

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A computer networking system having one or more central processing units, one or more memories, and one or more network connections, the system further comprising:

5 a mapping data structure representing two or more categories, each of the categories divided into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity, each of the ordered levels of specificity being a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity.

2. A system, as in claim 1, having one or more sections, the sections being logical intersections of one of the categories with one of the levels of specificity.

10 3. A system, as in claim 2, one or more subcategories having a degree of closeness relating the section to one or more other sections.

4. A system, as in claim 3, where the degree of closeness relates to any one or more of following:
a physical closeness of location of physical items represented by the respective sections,
a relational closeness between one or more users and one or more objects,

15 a relational closeness between one or more users, a semantic closeness of descriptions of items represented by the respective sections, a behavioral closeness of pattern of use.

5. A system, as in claim 1, where the categories include any one or more of the following: a product category, a service category, a category class, a category list, a product class, a list of products in a class, a product specification, a service class, a list of services, and a service specification.
- 5 6. A system, as in claim 1, where the levels of specificity include any one or more of the following: category class, category list, offering specification, product class, list of products in a class, product specification, service class, list of services, and a service specification.
7. A system, as in claim 1, further comprising one or more nodes located on one or more of the districts.
8. A system, as in claim 7, where the nodes are differentiated by any one or more node functions.
9. A system, as in claim 8, where the node functions include any one or more of the following: initiating a chat session, providing information, causing a user to be associated with a node location, providing access to sales information, providing access to a salesman, and changing a browser page to one that has information relating to the node.
- 15 10. A system, as in claim 7, where one or more of the nodes is a landmark that marks a salient location on one or more of the districts.

11. A system, as in claim 10, where the salient location is fixed and associated with one of the business categories.

12. A system, as in claim 10, where the salient location can change in time and is associated with an activity.

13. A system, as in claim 12, where the activity is any one or more of the following: a current “hot spot”, “a list of most popular pages in a computer section”, a public chat, a sale, a special product offering, a special service offering, and a sales agent availability.

14. A system, as in claim 10, where the salient location is personally meaningful to the user.

15. A system, as in claim 14, where the salient location represents any one or more of the following: a user’s buddy, a chat buddy, a private chat, a user’s favorite spot, and a user with common interest.

16. A system, as in claim 7, further comprising one or more paths, each path connecting two or more nodes.

17. A system, as in claim 16, where the path links two or more of the nodes to associate connectivity relationships among the nodes.

18. A system, as in claim 16, where a path is associated with one of the following: a user's path through one or more of the districts, a customer's path through one or more of the districts, a preferred path of a group of users through one or more of the districts, a preferred path of a group of users with common interests through one or more of the districts, and a preferred path of a group of users with complementary interests through one or more of the districts.

19. A system, as in claim 7, further comprising one or more node sets, each node set containing one or more nodes clustered in nearby locations in one or more of the districts.

20. A system, as in claim 19, where a node set represents a relationship among two or more nodes located in one or more of the districts.

21. A system, as in claim 19, where one or more of the node sets is associated with one of the following: a density of users gathered in one or more adjacent node locations, a set of node locations marking results of a search, a set of node locations related by a semantic attribute, a set of node locations visited by a group of users with common interests, a set of node locations visited by a group of users with complementary interests, and a crowd of users.

22. A system, as in claim 19, where one or more of the node sets has a node set function.

23. A system, as in claim 22, where the node set function includes any one or more of the following: providing information about the set, changing a user's location to be associated with a

node location in the set, changing browser page to one that has information relating to a node in the set.

24. A system, as in claim 1, where the information in the mapping data structure is server over one or more of the network connections so that one or more visual districts can be displayed on one or more clients.

25. A computer executed method comprising the steps of:

mapping data representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories divided into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;

dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity; and

displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern.

26. A computer program product storing a computer program comprising the steps of:

mapping data representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories divided into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;

dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity; and

displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern.

27. A computer system comprising:

5 means for mapping data representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories divided into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;

means for dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity; and

means for displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern.